

United and Unified

Names: Spencer Fairbairn, Paige Mawhinney and Evan Kilcoyne

Grades: Sophomores

Lesson: It doesn't matter if someone has a disability or not: we are all equal as human beings.

STORY BY REAGAN FITZKE
PHOTO BY REAGAN FITZKE

Spencer Fairbairn, a sophomore who helped with many of the handicapped students during this year's Unified soccer season, said his views on the world have been changed by working with the athletes.

"They've taught me that no matter what obstacles you face in life, you can always overcome it," Fairbairn said. "We may have different problems or challenges to face than the Unified athletes, but we all have our own personal difficulties to face. In their case, it would be their disability, but for someone like you or me, it could range from anything like schoolwork to sports."

This season, he mostly worked with sophomore brothers Alex Chambers and Kyle Chambers and freshman Austin Johnson.

"All of these amazing players have overcome their own challenges," Fairbairn said.

It is safe to say that most of the students at Mountain Vista High School have a level of respect for the Unified team.

It shows during pep rallies whenever the Unified athletes walk out into the open gym with their huge smiles, everyone in the crowd stands and cheers. Students consider the program to be a huge part of the school, and it isn't a surprise that many participated in the 2013 season of Unified soccer.

Students who get involved in this program find it very influential and important in their lives. People who participated by working together in Unified stated they were taught valuable life lessons to each and every one of the partners and athletes that they'll never forget.

Fairbairn helped coach the athletes in order to assist them with their skills. "One of the students I worked with had a difficult time scoring goals, but after lots of practice and determination, he finally scored for the first time during an important game," Fairbairn said.

He said he loves that the program emphasizes team cooperation and support. "It's just an inspiring program I'm proud to say that I'm a part of," Fairbairn said.

By joining the Unified program, sophomore Paige Mawhinney said she learned life lessons she will never forget. She said working with these student-athletes has changed the way she views their lives and what they go through every day.

"The Unified athletes never give up,"

Mawhinney said.

She said she realized they are as much of people as we are, no matter what disability is holding them back.

"The Unified athletes just take a little longer to do things, like scoring goals or running down-field, but it doesn't matter. They are just as equal to us as we are to them," Mawhinney said. Mawhinney said Unified soccer also taught her about the importance of accepting people for who they are, especially the handicapped students.

"I've seen a lot of people judge the unified athletes for their disabilities," she said, "What you say will impact them. You have to learn the boundaries for each player and know what they are feeling."

She finds it special that people actually help and watch the players because it truthfully has a positive effect on them. She's learned from her experiences that the athletes can learn and grow so much from the support and encouragement the partners give them, and above all, it makes them happy, too.

This year, sophomore Evan Kilcoyne played as a Unified athlete working hard with the partners in the program. With the immense amount of support from the school, he says they've had an amazing season. "We went undefeated," Kilcoyne said. "The team played really good."

The athletes found the partners in the program to be supportive and helpful, which assisted them in accomplishing their goals.

"I learned how to score a goal this season, which made me really happy," Kilcoyne said. Working with both the partners and athletes has helped team members. "Teamwork is very important in Unified," Kilcoyne said.

Everyone playing can help each other in one way or another, no matter if they're a partner or an athlete. Without the cooperation of everyone in the program, the team wouldn't have done as well as it did.

After the last game of the Unified soccer season, a 12-8 victory over Castle View, the team celebrated the end of the season at Chick-fil-A during their fundraiser.

"Everything that I do with these kids is amazing and it's such an honor to be a part of the program," Mawhinney said. "It's not all about you in the world. Unified taught me there are other people that come before you."

